

To many wild animals humans are a particularly alarming sight. By concealing the human figure, even with something like a tent or vehicle which does not resemble part of the natural environment, many species may be approached, observed and photographed with relative ease.

The conventional metal-framed hide commonly used for observing wildlife is not suitable for some species perhaps because they are very mobile and soon move out of sight or because the country they occupy is too rugged to carry in and set up such a hide. In the course of research on reproduction in lace monitors *Varanus varius* in the steep, timbered country of Deua National Park, New South Wales, a frameless hide was designed and has enabled many hours of observation to be made of the natural behaviour of these wary lizards. While wearing the hide other wary species were commonly seen, most notably Swamp Wallabies, Red-Necked Wallabies and Lyrebirds. They continued to feed, groom, rest and in the case of the Lyrebirds, perform spectacular courtship displays within a few metres of the hide. I believe this inexpensive, easily carried hide could be useful to zoologists, photographers and naturalists and so this note provides instructions for making one.

The hide is a large conical canvas bag with a viewing hole near the top. The materials and equipment required are: 2.5 m of proofed, olive drab, 8 ounce duck canvas; domestic sewing machine with a strong needle; reel of strong sewing thread.

Fold the canvas exactly in half (fig. 1). From a corner measure 30 cm along one of the selvages and mark (photographers may wish to have a longer seam at the top to accommodate long lenses and so should measure 40 or 50 cm). From that mark to the fold draw a diagonal line the same length as the width of the

A simple hide for observing wary animals

David Carter

Department of Zoology,
Australian National University,
G.P.O. Box 4,
Canberra.

canvas – normally 1.8 m. With sharp scissors cut along this diagonal line through both layers of canvas.

You now have a triangular piece and a larger rectangle with a deep V almost cutting the piece in two (fig. 2). Fold the large piece as it was when cut and run a seam along the diagonal to join the two sides of the V. Align a 1.8 m side of the triangle with a 1.8 m side of the large piece, making sure that the selvedge of the triangle is adjacent to the long selvedge of the large piece. Sew these two sides together. Similarly, align and sew along the 30 cm top and turn the article inside out. You will not need to sew a hem along the bottom because it is all selvedge.

Put the hide on so that the triangular piece is in front and the long diagonal seam is directly behind you and mark the viewing slit with a horizontal line at eye level. Cut along this line to form a slit wide enough to provide a clear view and to allow binoculars or camera lenses to pass through. Be careful not to cut as far as the seams on either side. The edges of the slit, particularly the corners, should be finished by sewing zig-zag or a narrow hem. Similarly, slits for the hands may be made to enable the operation of external equipment such as a large camera or a radiotelemetry antenna.

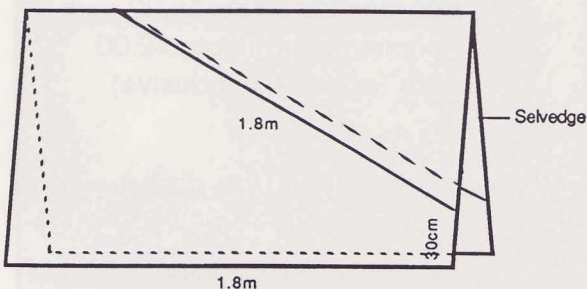


Fig. 1. Fold canvas, mark diagonal and cut through both layers.

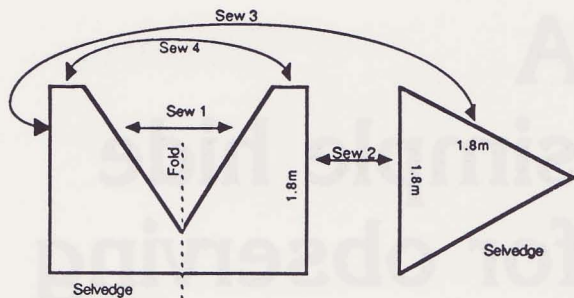


Fig. 2. Assemble the article, sewing each seam in the order shown.

The finished article (fig. 3) weighs about 2 kg and can be carried easily in the field either in a pack or folded over a belt around the waist. It can be used to conceal the wearer in the most rugged country and provides a reasonably comfortable waterproof shelter. Inside, there is plenty of room for a fully extended tripod and a large day pack. The long back part can be drawn underneath to sit on and the shorter front minimizes the chance of tripping on the hem when walking. If an animal is moving or the view is unsatisfactory it is easy to stand up inside the hide and move carefully to a better position. Although the rumpled canvas may not resemble anything naturally occurring at least it does not resemble a human and therefore will be ignored by many normally unapproachable species.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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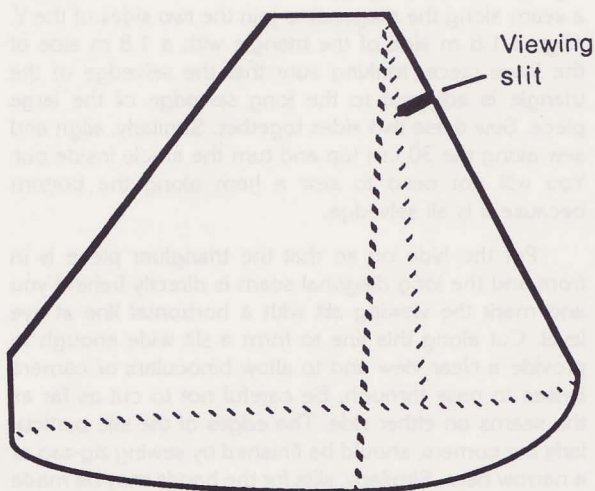


Fig. 3. The finished hide with viewing slit.

Royal Zoological Society

Members' Open Night at Taronga Zoo

Thursday, 23 February, 1989

This is your opportunity to come into the Zoo when it is quiet, bring a picnic tea, and enjoy a peaceful stroll with your family and a few friends. Members use their passes to gain entry after the Zoo closes, and may purchase tickets at reduced rates for family non-members or friends.

Time: 5.15-6.45 p.m. entry
(no admission after this) until
sunset (approx. 8.00 p.m.)

Cost: Free for RZS members.
Non-member adults \$5.00 each
Non-member children \$2.00
each (ages 4-16 inclusive)

Bookings (tickets **MUST** be purchased in advance): through the Society's Rooms (969 7336) or by writing to the RZS, P.O. Box 20, Mosman 2088.